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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRUSSELS 000331

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/11/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EUN](#) [XG](#)

SUBJECT: CENTRAL EUROPEANS DRIVE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BUT
FACE FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

REF: A. BRUSSELS 134

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 280

[1](#)C. BRUSSELS 277

Classified By: USEU POLITICAL M-C CHRIS DAVIS, FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and introduction: Experts on EU policy development point to the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative as the most successful example of how Central European member states have been able to influence EU foreign policy to date.

The Eastern Partnership is designed to encourage political and economic stability in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, while over time bringing these countries closer to the EU. Originally a Czech concept, the plan came to life when Poland partnered with Sweden to win EU support. The plan will officially be launched by the Czech EU presidency at a summit on May 7 in Prague. As a model of how to advance a member state's policy interests in Brussels, the Eastern Partnership Initiative is evidence that Warsaw is becoming more effective at influencing EU policies. Although Eastern Partnership is officially endorsed by the European Council, support for it varies among the EU member states, however, due largely to competition over financial resources for Neighborhood programs in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. The global economic slowdown is prompting the EU's largest budget contributing states to look increasingly inward even as the Eastern neighborhood requires more financial assistance to ensure stability. Some of the member states' enthusiasm for the project has also been tempered by concerns over negative Russian reactions to increased EU activism in the post-Soviet sphere.

[1](#)2. (C) This cable is the third in a series (REF A and B) looking at how the Central European states that joined the EU since 2004 -- Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia -- commonly known as the CE-10, are faring within EU institutions, especially when it comes to initiating policies in Brussels. End summary and Introduction.

Eastern Partnership Aims to Bring
Post Soviet States Closer to EU

[1](#)3. (C) Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson, Policy Fellows with the European Council on Foreign Relations, recently asserted to Poloff that the Eastern Partnership Initiative is the most successful example of Central European states' impact on EU foreign policy to date. The Eastern Partnership Initiative was presented to the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on May 26, 2008 by Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, with assistance from Sweden, and accepted by the European Council on June 20, 2008. The Eastern Partnership was designed to provide an

institutionalized forum for discussing visa agreements, free trade deals, and strategic partnership agreements with the EU's eastern neighbors, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. A bureaucratic challenge concerning where Eastern Partnership fits within the European Neighborhood Policy lingers. Local EU observers speculate that organizational shuffling may occur after this autumn, when the new Commission is seated. Presently, unlike the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership does not have its own secretariat, but is set to be managed directly by the European Commission.

14. (SBU) Although Warsaw has sought the inclusion of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership Initiative, a particularly sensitive issue given the Polish minority there, its level of participation remains uncertain. Although a senior policy advisor to the Council Secretariat told us in late February that Belarus's inclusion in Eastern Partnership is "a foregone conclusion," statements from the Czech EU Presidency have indicated otherwise. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg on February 23 in Brussels noted uncertainties about Belarus's inclusion in Eastern Partnership, and he specifically warned Minsk not to recognize South Ossetia or Abkhazia, which he said would put Belarus "out of the European consensus" (REF C). At a conference sponsored by the European Parliament on March 4, Jacek Protasiewicz, Chairman of the Delegation on Relations with Belarus within the European Parliament, Helga Schmid, Director of the Policy Unit of the General Secretariat in the EU Council, and Hugues Mingarelli, Deputy Director of the DG RELEX in the European Commission all cautioned that Belarus's progress, especially on releasing political prisoners and allowing two independent

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media outlets to register, can be easily reversed. The Council and Commission representatives called for systemic improvements in the areas of free and fair elections, freedom of speech, assembly and association, and cancellation of certain elements of a new criminal code, whose provisions, they argued, would make it easier for the regime to prosecute political dissenters. In the presence of the Belarusian Ambassador to the EU, Uladzimir Syanko, Mingarelli outlined all the carrots that the Commission is prepared to offer Minsk, provided steady progress on democratization and human rights standards continue. Syanko responded by saying that Belarus would only welcome an EU partnership without preconditions, and criticized the EU's "excessive focus on spreading democracy."

Poland's Growing EU Expertise
Makes Eastern Partnership a Reality

15. (C) Policy Fellow Andrew Wilson noted that the Eastern Partnership is an excellent case study of how best to advance a member state's initiative in the EU and demonstrates Warsaw's growing expertise of the EU system. He pointed out that Eastern Partnership was originally a Czech idea, but that Warsaw proved successful where the Czechs did not because of Poland's larger size and its proven ability to multiply its influence through coalition building. Separately, David Kral, Director of Europeum, a Prague-based EU policy think-tank, asserted that Prague failed to lead on Eastern Partnership because the Czechs presented the first proposal to the European Council "quite clumsily and unilaterally." Kral claimed that the idea of Eastern Partnership was born in the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs while the Czechs held the presidency of the Visegrad regional grouping, and maintained that the Czechs later passed the concept to the Poles. (Note: The Visegrad Group includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. End note.) Popescu asserted that what really rocketed Poland's Eastern Partnership efforts was its decision to partner with Sweden, which significantly enhanced the proposal's credibility among member states. While the Czech Republic and Lithuania have

certainly been active interlocutors on Eastern issues in the EU, a move by Poland to partner exclusively with those states probably would have been perceived in Brussels as a "New Europe" versus "Old Europe" approach. Indeed, Wilson noted that more established member states still harbor the perception that Central European states are troublemakers when it comes to eastern policies. Secondly, a coalition of only new member states probably would have added credence to Russian suspicions that Eastern Partnership is an attempt by the new member states to undermine Moscow's influence in the region. Popescu asserted that the Eastern Partnership Initiative represents a successful model in the art of EU coalition building, which the Central European states are likely to emulate in future efforts to influence EU policies.

Differing Regional Preferences
and Budgetary Concerns Remain Obstacles

16. (C) Poloff met on February 24 with Piotr Kaczynski, a Research Fellow with the Centre for European Policy Studies. Kaczynski posited that, even though Eastern Partnership has been accepted by the Council, it is likely to be underfunded. Poland and other supportive member states, he said, will need to shore up backing for the initiative from other member states. Kaczynski explained that although Poland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Lithuania completely support the project, Bulgaria and Romania remain lukewarm. They view it as competitor for EU resources for their regional priority, the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue and the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation. For their part, Germany and France have expressed concern that Eastern Partnership will be viewed as a stepping stone toward EU membership, an effect Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski in fact welcomed in May 2008. France, Spain, Italy and Greece favor the Union for the Mediterranean, initiated by Paris on 13 July 2008, over Eastern Partnership. Slovakia and Hungary tend to prioritize efforts in the Balkans. Poloff spoke on 3 March with Andor David, a Balkans expert with the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who claimed that Budapest was indeed concerned that focusing on the Eastern Partnership risks taking attention away from the Balkans. David cynically viewed the Eastern Partnership as an effort by Central European states to prevent all of the EU's neighborhood

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policy funds from going to Mediterranean initiatives. Such competition will come to a head when time to allocate resources, particularly given the global economic slowdown. An additional dimension to the funding concerns comes from domestic constituents, even among member states that support Eastern Partnership. A Czech Member of the European Parliament recently told Mission officials that convincing local constituents of the value of fully funding neighborhood policy initiatives is a hard sell, as voters want to see EU funds spent on EU citizens directly.

17. (C) EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner on 23 February unsuccessfully called on EU foreign ministers to agree to increase the Eastern Partnership budget by some \$440 million (350 million Euro). She justified the request by pointing to the Russian-Georgian conflict, the recent gas crisis, and the need to stabilize the political and economic situations of the EU's eastern neighbors. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner spoke out against the request for additional funds, declaring EU members had already agreed to give two-thirds of their neighborhood policy budget to Mediterranean countries, and one-third to Eastern Partnership. Even though Kouchner acknowledged that the current budget of some \$19 million (15 million Euro) a year earmarked for the each of the six eastern countries was insufficient to have a real impact, especially considering the plight of Ukraine's economy, he opposed increasing the Eastern Partnership's budget.

Kaczynski also pointed to the controversy Kouchner stirred when he suggested that Russia and Turkey also be involved in some Eastern Partnership initiatives, so that Russia does not conclude it is being surrounded. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg responded to journalists on this issue with what some EU observers interpreted as sarcasm, saying, "We have nothing against a third country taking part in projects - not only Russia and Turkey, but maybe also Japan, the United States or China. Why not? We are open to cooperation with many countries." (REF C)

18. (C) Comment: The Eastern Partnership Initiative represents the most successful example of how new Central European member states have been able to influence EU foreign policy. Moreover, it is a good model of the type of coalition building that is needed to win EU support for future initiatives. Poland, Sweden, and the other member states that prioritize the Eastern Partnership Initiative must still ensure that this initiative has adequate funding to effectively advance economic and political stability on the EU's eastern borders. To ensure success, Eastern Partnership's advocates might be tempted to take their coalition building efforts outside of the EU for added support, to include the United States. End comment.

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